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GILBERT STUART'S PORTRAIT OF LORD FITZGIBBON

The Museum has just acquired by purchase its most important addition to its collection of early American art in a portrait by Gilbert Stuart, of John, Lord Fitzgibbon, and it has been hung in the position of honor in Gallery I.

Born in 1749 at Donnybrook, Fitzgibbon distinguished himself while a student at Trinity College, Dublin, and later at Christ Church, Oxford, and in 1772 he was called to the Irish bar. Honors came to him in quick succession. From 1778 to 1783 he represented Dublin University in parliament and in the latter year he was rewarded by Grattan with the post of Attorney General. In 1789 upon becoming Lord Chancellor of Ireland he was raised to the peerage with the title of Baron Fitzgibbon of Lower Connello. Four years later he was made a viscount and in 1795 he was created Earl of Clare. Fitzgibbon kept on good terms with both the government and the Nationalists and remained until the union the directing head of the Irish government, using his great influence to oppose every movement of reform, particularly exerting himself in the repression of all movements to improve the condition of the Roman Catholics. In his judicial capacity he showed great rapidity of decision and sought every opportunity to remove legal abuses. He was cold and unemotional, vain, intolerably insolent and not over-nice in the methods used to gain his ends. He was, however, an indulgent landlord, in private life kindly and true, and he always acted with uniform courage. None of his contemporaries in Ireland was his equal in ability, but he was regarded, as one might expect, with intense hatred by a great part of his fellow-countrymen. Fitzgibbon married in 1786 and at his death in January, 1802, left two sons who both succeeded to the earldom. The younger son had an only son who was killed at Balaklava in the charge of the Light Brigade in 1854, and at the death ten years later of the third earl the title became extinct.

Gilbert Stuart was born in the Narragansett country in Rhode Island, December 3, 1755—the youngest child of a Scotch immigrant who had married into a well-known Rhode Island family. When a youth he accompanied a Scotch painter named Cosmo Alexander, whom he had met in Newport, to Scotland, but Alexander dying soon after left Stuart without resources in a strange land and he had to work his way home on a collier. He reached Rhode Island in 1774. At the outbreak of the revolution a year later Stuart's father, being a Tory, removed to Nova Scotia, and the day before the fight at Bunker Hill the son sailed from Boston for London where after supporting himself in a desultory way by painting portraits and acting as organist in a London church, he presented himself to Benjamin West, who accepted him as a pupil and later as an inmate of his house. Here he attended lectures on anatomy, studied in the school of the Royal Academy and became familiar with the works of the painters of the Golden Age of English portrait work. In 1777 he exhibited a portrait at the Royal Academy and at different times during the next eight years. In 1782 his portrait of William Grant skating in St. James' Park was shown at the Academy, a picture still owned in England, which established his reputation and gave him sufficient confidence to set up for himself. Work poured in upon him from the King downward through the social scale, but his indifference to money matters and an extravagant method of living found him in 1787 deeply in debt, and to escape his creditors he left England and started afresh in Dublin where his success continued unabated. In 1793, partly from a desire to paint Washington, but also partly because of financial difficulties, he sailed for New York and henceforth his life was passed in this country. In 1794 or early in 1795 he removed to Philadelphia, in 1803 to Washington, and in 1805 to Boston, where he died July 27, 1828, in his seventy-third year.

As a painter of portraits he remains unexcelled. No artist has surpassed him in the subtle representation of flesh, tonal quality and color, and character drawing—the whole produced with the utmost simplicity and directness of method. He was a very rapid worker, and the writer has identified nearly twelve hundred portraits from his brush, and of these less than a dozen are signed. "I sign them all over," replied Stuart to an enquiring

sitter. His best period may be said to extend from about 1778 to 1810, but even up to his death he produced portraits which not infrequently showed no failure of his early power.

The portrait of Fitzgibbon which shows him at full-length measures 96½ inches in height and 60⅝ inches in width and was painted in Dublin in 1789, when the subject was in his fortieth year and just after he had risen to the high office of Lord Chancellor, in whose robes he is shown dressed. A thick powdered wig with long ends falling over both shoulders nearly encircles a ruddy, rather bony face, turned, as are the brown eyes, to the spectator's left. An insolent expression lurks about the mouth and his attitude is one of defiance as he stands firmly with feet somewhat apart and the right arm thrown back, with the hand resting on the hip. Under the black flowing robe, richly decorated with gold, is seen a black coat and waistcoat, brownish-black satin knee breeches, black silk stockings, and feet encased in low black shoes relieved by large gold buckles. His left hand, hanging at his side, holds an unopened letter. At his left is a table covered with an old rose cloth on which lies the gold mace, while on the floor, leaning against the table cover, is the Chancellor's purse richly embroidered with the arms of Great Britain. In the background is a stone column about which is draped an old rose curtain, somewhat lighter in tone than the table cloth, folded back at the left, disclosing an indefinite landscape and an attractive sky of yellowish and pinkish clouds. Exclusive of the Washington portraits, Stuart probably never painted more than half a dozen full-lengths.

The portrait, at the death of the third earl in 1864, came into the possession of A. J. Beresford-Hope, Esq., of Bedgebury, Kent, a descendant of the first earl's sister, and was exhibited by him in 1868 at the South Kensington Historical Portrait Exhibition. At the sale of the Bedgebury estate last May the picture was bought by a New York dealer who brought it to this country. A copy made about 1789 by Robert Home (1752-1834) hangs in the Examination Hall of Trinity College and another is in the King's Inns, Dublin. The Museum picture was engraved in 1790 in mezzotint by Charles H. Hodges. It has also been engraved at half length in stipple, by W. Sedgwick, and in line by S. Freeman, J. B. Bird and Le Conte.

L.P.